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TEXTOS EM PORTUGUÊS/INGLÊS



PERSPECTIVES IN MOVEMENT:
 EPISTEMOLOGICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL
 CONCEPTIONS OF ENGLISH TEACHERS IN MATO GROSSO

PERSPECTIVAS EM MOVIMENTO: CONCEPÇÕES
 EPISTEMOLÓGICAS E
 METODOLÓGICAS DE PROFESSORES DE INGLÊS EM
 MATO GROSSO

Ana Antônia de Assis-Peterson
 Delvânia Aparecida Góes dos Santos
 Lediane Manfé de Souza

ABSTRACT: In the last decades, critical pedagogy and critical literacy in the field of Applied Linguistics have been strong theories to review, rethink and re-signify linguistic education, in particular, in the field of English teaching in Brazil, that for many years has remained hostage of the “banking education model” (“depositing of information” by teachers into their students) criticized by Paulo Freire in the 70’s when he dismissed the hypothesis of teaching by rote and shaped linguistic education as a political act and literacy as a process in which people, historically situated, are central and viewed as agents. This study had as its main goal to investigate epistemological methodological conceptions of public school teachers of English based on the generation of data coming from different contexts – a second-degree course and a continuing education course in the state of Mato Grosso. In both contexts, the instructors introduced concepts and promoted discussions involving critical literacies. The results showed that teachers need interactions and mediations more frequently so that they can feel more capable of carrying on the desired theoretical confrontations. However, it was also clear that, when in contact with the more critical theories of teaching, teachers demonstrate disposition to escape from the “territory of lamentations” by attempting to propose their own concept of what critical literacy is and trying to reshape their pedagogical doings with respect to the teaching of English.

KEYWORDS: Linguistic education; critical literacy; English teachers’ perspectives.

RESUMO: Nas últimas décadas, a pedagogia crítica e letramento crítico têm sido teorias robustas para rever, repensar e (re)significar o modelo de ensino de línguas, em especial, na área de língua inglesa no Brasil, que, por muitos anos, manteve-se refém da educação “bancária” (“depósito de informação” pelos professores nos seus alunos), criticada nos anos setenta por Paulo Freire, quando desbancou a hipótese do ensino da “decoreba” e formatou a educação linguística como um ato político e o letramento como um proces-

so no qual pessoas, historicamente situadas, são fundamentais e vistas como agentes. Este estudo teve como objetivo identificar concepções epistemológicas e metodológicas de professores de inglês de escola pública através de dados gerados em dois contextos diferentes – um curso de segunda licenciatura e um curso de formação continuada realizados no estado de Mato Grosso. Em ambos os contextos, as professoras ministrantes introduziram conceitos e promoveram discussão em torno do letramento crítico. Constatou-se que os professores precisam de interações e mediações mais frequentes para se sentirem capazes de fazer os enfrentamentos teóricos desejados. Contudo, evidenciou-se também que, quando em contato com teorias mais críticas de ensino, os professores demonstram disposição para sair do “território das lamentações”, arriscando uma conceitualização própria do que é letramento crítico e dando novos significados às suas práticas de ensino de inglês.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Educação linguística; letramento crítico; perspectivas de professores de inglês.

Introduction

The strongest alternative construct to rethink linguistics education in the last decades has been critical literacy broadly discussed among Brazilian and foreign authors (COPE; KALANTZIS, 2000; GEE, 2000; CERVETTI; PARDALES; DAMICO, 2001; LANKSHEAR; KNOBEL, 2003; SNYDER, 2008; MENEZES DE SOUZA, 2011; ZACCHI, 2012; JORDÃO, 2013; MONTE MÓR, 2013; among others).

In the theory of critical literacy according to Zacchi (2012, p. 11), knowledge is seen as “being constructed in a way that the meaning of a determined text is always multiple and dependent on the context in which it is conveyed and interpreted leaving more space as much for different interpretations as for social action”. In this conception there is not a defined knowledge about reality because the truth can not be defined in a relation of correspondence with reality because that depends on the localized context (MONTE MÓR, 2010, p.445).

Cox and Assis-Peterson (1999, 2001, 2002) carried out some studies trying to delineate a profile of the English teacher that was active in the scenario of public schools in Mato Grosso and probably in other peripheral regions in Brazil in the begging of 2000. They sought to know if critical pedagogy and the political dimension of education had already touched English teachers. The authors concluded that the teachers were still convinced that the binomial “linguistic competence and pedagogical competence” was the best way to teach/learn a foreign language.

According to Cox and Assis-Peterson, the teachers of English at the time had not yet been involved with critical pedagogy because it is, contradictorily, the result of the great division that in the capitalist world separates educational research from teaching practice, that is, those who study from those who teach, those who propose from those who apply. One of the social impacts or effects of this type of formation of educators – in which the interaction/collaboration in the construction of knowledge does not happen – is that the theories about teaching/learning are habitually shown to be irrelevant because they are divorced from practice presupposing ideal contexts and subjects instead of critical subjects who appropriate the language to enter into the scenario of negotiations of meaning. The educational researches do not reach the teachers but stay confined in the academic universe. When they arrive, they are still inaccessible because they are hermetic discourses made to circulate between the initiated, between the peers.

In this study, we return to reexamine English teachers searching to identify their epistemological and methodological conceptions in the current settings without pretensions to trace a comparative chart between the past and present but with the objective to demonstrate the perspectives of English teachers about their formation and teaching practice rooted in the social and cultural contexts in the extensive geographical space that is Mato Grosso.

Today times are different; new terms/concepts/proposals were added to the teacher's repertory principally Critical Literacy, New Literacies, Multimodal Literacies and Multiliteracies.

The present study is based on the generation of data coming from different contexts – a second-degree program and a continuing education course. In both contexts to a greater or lesser degree, the instructors introduced concepts and promoted discussions involving critical literacies.

Beyond the introduction, this text is organized in three parts. In the first part, we introduce rapidly the theory of critical literacy; in the second part, we emphasize the teachers' enunciations regarding their epistemological and methodological conceptions; in the third part as a conclusion, we reflect about the conceptions that emerged as a result of this study.

Critical Literacy: academic voices

One of the central questions of post-modernity appears to be the quest for a more just global education capable of "improving every child's educational opportunities" (COPE; KALANTZIS, 1996, p.6) and accessibility to knowledge. In its axiom to include the reader as a producer of meanings, critical literacy justly seeks to confront this challenge.

According to Cope and Kalantzis (1996, p. 4), to engage in pedagogies of critical literacy, it is necessary to consider the new demands that are imposed on people as creators of meaning in practically three dimensions of their lives that are in constant change: in the workplaces, as citizens of public spaces and as citizens in their daily life within their communities.

It is in this setting of intense social transformations marked by multiple and heterogeneous global processes that the meeting of the differences of all humanity demands exploration of other trails to rethink linguistic education. We have moved from the paradigm of knowledge transference to the paradigm of construction and production of knowledge; from the theories of certainty to the theories of imprevisibility; from

linear management to chaotic management of learning; from the neutrality of language to the questions of ideology and power; from the graphic technologies to digital; from demarcated frontiers to deterritorialized and glocal spaces.

It is in this context, with the complexifying world and education that we started to question the technical teacher and installed the critical teacher and researcher. We questioned not only the vision of the subject as essence and unity but also the conception of language and culture as being fixed and immutable to bring about the perspectives of subject, of language and of culture as heterogeneous and unfinished elements in constant flux.

We also questioned the role of the English teacher as the propagator of neutral language and we highlighted the ideological character that language and culture are inseparable and that, because of this, teachers of the English need to consider the teaching of English departing from a local perspective.

Researchers and teachers interrogate one another: what needs to be taught in a world that transforms rapidly and how can this be taught? What competencies and skills need to be developed so that English teachers, in the case of this study meet the challenge of understanding the context in which the school is inserted and how to respond to this reality? How to prepare in the “here and now” of the intersubjective and contingent practices to actions of the classroom participants not only a speaker of languages but also a literate citizen “capable of participating critically in the world, suitable for the transit in complex contemporaneous societies and prepared to cope with diversity and intercultural transit?” (SCHLATTER; GARCEZ, 2009, p. 131).

Among the researchers it is emphasized the that we need matrices and inspiring sources – not from models to be reproduced – with forms and thought(s) that permit plausible solutions in accordance with the lived reality and with the awareness that any solution is relatively provisory.

In the theories of new literacies and of critical literacy, there is an awareness that there is no way to “model”, “format”, “reformat”, “disformat”, “sanitize” or “extinguish” the other (differences, diversities) without grave social prejudices for the involved; the dialogue and the collaboration become the methodological principles of the possibilities of doing education (MENEZES DE SOUZA, 2011).

The official document *The Curricular Orientations for Secondary Education – OCEM* (BRASIL, 2006), as well as the previous ones (PCNEF 1997, PCNEM 2000), catalyzes the tendency to rupture with the paradigm of traditional teaching centered on the transmission of knowledge to strive for education for citizenship that includes not only linguistic proficiency but also the development of social awareness for a new view of the world.

To learn another language has become to be understood as comprehension of its different uses and its contextual, cultural, social and historic situationality. By means of critical and multiple literacies, a classroom can be opened to the heterogeneity of discursive genres preparing English students for “an unknown future, to act in new, unpredictable and uncertain situations” (BRASIL, 2006, p. 109).

According to Jorge (2012), understanding the basic principles of critical literacy assumed by OCEM is essential to generate a viable connection between the teaching of a foreign language and the general education of the individual.

Authors of the area of literacy, linguistic education and discourse analysis that treat the theories involving the term ‘critical literacy’, have sought to outline an historical comprehension of the term emphasizing the nuances between the concepts of critical literacy, literacy, critical literacies, multi-literacies, multi-modal literacies and new literacies¹.

According to Heath and Street (2008, p. 26), critical literacy studies shared theoretical starting points with scholars that expanded their work beyond the educational institution to government bureaucracy, employment opportunities and available medical service. One difference between them, above all, is that there are those that centralize the work in “Discourse” (sharing definition with Culture but focusing on signs and symbols) and others in “discourse” (defined in the ordinary sense as a set of enunciations).

However, in the scope of this work, there is no room to discuss the tones of these concepts. Debates and redefinitions between language and literacy will continue for many years. We prefer to present, in a brief and thankless way, a synthesis of our comprehension of the critical literacy conception by Menezes de Souza (2011), which redefines the concept

1 Among those that work abroad with critical literacy are James Gee e Colin Lankshear and the components of the New London Group such as Courtney Cazden, Allen Luke, Brian Street and others. We recommend reading of Gee (1996, 2000), Lankshear e Knobel (2003), New London Group (1996) for the theoretical histories of these groups.

of 'critic', emphasizing its temporal and historical, political and ethical aspect in education.

In our view, according to Menezes de Souza, critical literacy is in harmony with the teaching of an additional language that favors the participation of teachers and students in the discursive process in the interaction with others in the sense of "a group of citizens of interconnected interests that seek the common good" (GIMENEZ, 1998, p. 5), having the view that ethical questions can not be removed from our actions. In this way, Menezes de Souza (2011) makes use of a definition of critical literacy that we consider adequate for our work.

According to the author, to establish a wider definition of critical literacy we should first redefine what we mean by "critical". The traditional use of this word refers to a process that desires clear and unequivocal understanding of a text taking into account the social context and possible prejudices and agendas of the author in question.

Thinking "critically", in this sense, is to be attentive to subtleties that can consciously or unconsciously be placed by the author of a text; subtleties based on the social origin of the author or in implicit objectives coming from his class or ideology. It would be, to use an expression more informal, "to read between the lines".

For Menezes de Souza, this definition of "critical" is acceptable but not exhaustive. Inspired in the ideas of Hoy and in the theories of Frenchmen like Michel Foucault and Roland Barthes – that emphasize the "death of the author" and the importance of the reader as a producer of meanings – Menezes de Souza suggests another dimension that should be added to our concept of "critical."

The reader is not only a neutral being that analyzes the text and guides its reading taking into account the social conditionality of the author but is, himself also, a subjective being part of a larger and changeable community, and also with his own prejudices and with his own historicity. For Menezes de Souza, the reader that understands his limitations and his role in the production of meanings is among those that read in a way really "critically".

Assuming this premise, Menezes de Souza elaborates a definition of critical literacy that we could call maximalist. It is maximalist because it presupposes not only that the author is conditioned by context and socio-historic origin, but also that we, the readers, should be conscious of our limitations of social origin and of our moment in history, and consequently of the possible effects in the production of meanings of

texts. It is an elaboration of a dichotomy postulated by Paulo Freire: *being in the world vs being with the world*. It is in “being with the world” – in this awareness of being an agent that produces effects over a community and at the same time suffers effects stemming from that same community – that Menezes places his definition of critical literacy.

Epistemological and methodological conceptions: voices of teachers

In this section we present enunciations/statements of English teachers related to their epistemological and methodological conceptions. The data were generated by two qualitative studies realized in different contexts of education.

In the first context, the data were generated by teachers in service in the state public school system that participated in the first and second class of Second Bachelor Degree in English Language and Literature of the Parfor Program (National Plan for the Education of Teachers of Basic Education)² – realized in the city of Rondonópolis in 2011/2012 and 2012/2013³. The class was attended by teachers that possessed a degree in diverse areas (geography, mathematics, biology, history, pedagogy, Portuguese) but almost all already taught English even with limited knowledge and without possessing specific formation (education) in the area.

In the second context, the class was attended by actual English teachers qualified in the area that participated in the course “Continuing Education for English Teachers: critical teaching” that occurred in 2013 in Sorriso 412 km north of Cuiaba, the capital of Mato Grosso⁴.

Teachers in Action (Rondonópolis)

The curriculum of the Parfor Program offered disciplines more specific of the area such as English Language (I to IV), Linguistic Conversation and Composition of English (I and II), Applied Linguistics of the Teaching of English (a short history of the theories of Second Language Acquisition and methods and approaches that emerged from these theo-

2 Parfor, in face-to-face teaching mode, is an emergency Program instituted to attend the provisions in article 11, item III of the Decree nº 6.755, of January 29, 2009 and implanted in a collaborative partnership between Capes, the states, municipalities, federal district and the Institutions of Higher Education – IES.

3 The teachers in the second-degree program had modular and face-to-face classes during the months of January and July of 2011/2012 and 2012/2013. The classes were given intensively in three periods (morning, afternoon and night) during the whole month.

4 The teachers of continuing education participated in modular and face-to-face encounters in March and December of 2013. The encounters were realized twice a month totaling a load of a hundred hours (80 hours in class and 20 hours of extracurricular activities).

ries), English Literature, North American Literature and Supervised Internship (I and II), as well as disciplines with more comprehensive formation like Philosophy of Language, Introduction to Linguistics, Psychology of Education and Public Policy in Education.

These teachers in the second-degree program had English classes⁵ more in accord with the audiovisual method (the use of figures to present the language, followed by repetition) and the communicative approach, that is, the focus was the knowledge of grammatical rules in conjunction with the capacity to use these rules for determined communicative ends.

More oriented theoretical discussions about the concepts of globalization and the teaching of the English language, linguistic-cultural diversity, language and power, identities at stake, global/local relations, heterogeneity and critical literacy happened only in discipline of Linguistics related to the English Language⁶.

It is important to emphasize that this discipline was practically the only opportunity within the second-degree program that the teachers had to discuss language in a more critical perspective in a way to denaturalize/deconstruct the concept of language as a set of rules and structures for instrumental and communicative ends providing perspectives of language embedded in relations of power and possibilities of social transformation.

According to these considerations about the more specific disciplines in English language, it is already possible to see at least two coexistent epistemologies – one encountered in a positivist paradigm and the other presented in a more socio-historical perspective of language.

Such epistemologies, more the first than the second one, are present in the education and teaching of the mother tongue (Portuguese) in Brazil. The first, represented by a positivist educational policy, and the second, permeated by revolutionary sentiments that circulate in the work and ideas of Paulo Freire⁷ and are more restricted to the context of education in the field and of popular social movements.

5 English Language I, II, III and IV and Conversation and Composition I and II.

6 The professor collaborating in this study – Delvânia A. Góes dos Santos – taught the referred discipline.

7 Works: *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and *Pedagogy of Autonomy*.

During the course⁸ we selected some statements of teachers that surfaced in the discussions⁹:

I observed that people have many forms to communicate among themselves, not only in Brazil, but also in the whole world; I liked to get to know a little about this. We share different experiences with people that live in different cultures and carry a little bit of those experiences in their day to day (Sonia).

The observation of teacher Sônia shows us the effects of meaning of a hegemonic teaching, in which the American or British version of English commonly circulates. Perhaps until then, she had not thought that the sociolinguistic variations that occur in Portuguese could also occur in English.

When she says: “we share different experiences with people that live in different cultures”, the teacher refers to moments in the discipline where was shown, by way of images and sounds, the diverse English-speaking countries and the cultural diversity that constitutes the realities of speakers of English.

The effects of meaning of hegemonic discourses and the impacts provoked by traditional methods about what one thinks of language can also be perceived in the perspectives of teachers Felícia, Joana and Regina:

Now when I hear an English word, I think of the world, of the various parts of the world. (Felícia).

These concepts made me see that reflection about the way we see language is important. (Joana).

I saw English as important but I thought it was more to speak with people of other places, but now I see that it is much more than this, language can be used for inclusion, to bring and take ideas, to make people think. The idea of English to travel the world now stays in the background. (Regina).

8 The discipline of Linguistics of the English Language, workload of 60 hours, happened during the month of July 2011 and July/January 2012 for the 1st e 2nd class, respectively, concentrated in two and a half weeks with encounters daily of 4 hours, being taught sometimes in the morning, afternoon or evening because they were interspersed with other disciplines of the same format. The discussions proposed for the discipline revolved around concepts of language and power, linguistic-cultural heterogeneity, identities, globalization and post-colonialism, critical literacy, citizenship, global/local, diversity.

9 These data (informal talks of teachers) were generated from drawings made by the teachers and their own interpretations, from reflections written in reports of Supervised Internship and drafts of articles in construction such as the course’s final paper.

A more critical perspective of English emerges in the statement of teacher Augusto “I see that language is a social construction of a group of persons that people construct in their daily life” (Augusto) and gains more positioning in the idea of teacher Minerva¹⁰:

The study of the English language in the world refers to a question to project inclusion, this involves social, political, cultural and educational questions of all nations covering all the regions of these countries including all the persons from elementary up to higher education, thus the individual is inserted as an integrator citizen, recognizing languages as conflicting, antagonistic, ambiguous, this requires the ability to construct and reconstruct meanings and to recognize diversities, to reinterpret [...] (Minerva).

The perspectives of language of these two teachers put into evidence the meaning of agency of the individual (“people construct in the day to day”), placing [the language] in a social view (“language is a social construction of a group of persons”) and in a project of citizenship (“refers to a question to project inclusion, this involves social, political, cultural and educational questions of all nations covering all the regions of these countries”).

However, we also want to emphasize the thinking of teacher Minerva when she presents, in her perspective, indicators of transformation that to her would be to conduct a comprehensive and critical project of linguistic education:

[...] the individual is inserted as an integrator citizen, **recognizing languages as conflicting, antagonistic, ambiguous**, this requires the **ability to construct and reconstruct meanings and to recognize diversities**, to reinterpret (Prof. Minerva).

The thinking of teacher Minerva strengthens what was said by Mattos and Valério (2010, p. 138), when the authors articulate a modification of communicative teaching to a more critical education mode under the literacy perspectives¹¹:

10 The final task of the discipline was for the teachers to write about their perspective of the English language after the discussions that occurred along the two weeks. Only teacher Minerva contributed with data this time.

11 By literacy we refer to the concepts coming from the perspectives of Critical Literacy, New Literacy and Multiliteracy.

Drawing from assumptions of the critical social theory, Critical Literacy understands the text as a product of ideological and sociopolitical forces, and is a “place of fight, negotiation and change” (NORTON, 2007, p. 6). Also it constitutes itself drawing upon critical pedagogy of Paulo Freire and his vision of language as a liberator element (MATOS; VALÉRIO, 2010, p. 138).

In January and July of 2012/2012, during their internship, the teachers did classroom observation and taught classes, respectively. Reading and analyzing their reports, we perceive that the traditional practices (methodologies) prevailed.

Such an occurrence is understandable if we consider the realities lived in their practices of daily teaching, the social tradition of teaching English in Brazil and the fact that in their second-degree program the prevailing epistemologies of language were based on grammatical rules and language as a tool for communicative purposes in its “weakest” version as well placed by Mattos e Valério (2010, p.137).

Proceeding with the presentation of data, we will dialogue with what we denominate “clippings of stories of teacher in the second-degree program”, that is nothing more than readings or interpretations of the participant teachers in the study with regard to the teaching practice of peers of the network and their own practices¹². Let us see.

I noticed certain insecurity when the teacher would explain determined activities to the students. Perhaps for this reason, she had limited herself and worked only with translation of texts, identification of verbs, nouns and adjectives. The students spent a large part of the time copying texts from the blackboard, however, despite the complaints, a majority of the students participated in the classes performing the proposed activities [...] (Felicía).

In this narrative we perceive that teacher Felícia observed not only the performance of the teacher in service but the attitude, interaction and the behavior of the students in relation to what was being proposed in the context of that class. In the interpretation of teacher Felícia, the practice limited to traditional teaching was viewed as a possible “insecurity of the teacher”. What, in our view, is a clear indicator of the lack of policies of continuing education for teachers of languages.

12 Data generated by teachers of second-degree program in the disciplines of Supervised Internship I (Classroom Observation) and Supervised Internship II (Teaching Practice).

Teacher Felícia emphasizes that, “despite the complaints”, the majority of the students “participated in the classes”, “performing the proposed activities”. Here, the role of the students appears to limit itself to doing what was imposed on them (the teacher orders, the student obeys).

However, the behavior of the “complainer” here is also an indicator pointed out by the observing teacher as resulting from a “non-motivating” practice and dissonant from what generates “identification” among students and what is being studied, and then Felícia makes a suggestion:

I believe that the classes would be more interesting if the teacher brought a more relaxing activity. Music, for example, usually pleases more than texts. Generally some students already identify, already know the rhythm of the music in question and this helps a lot (Felícia).

The idea of intervention about the practice of teaching observed by teacher Felícia did not die on the suggestion. On the contrary, it was transformed in one of her teaching practices six months later with regarding her own version told in the report of internship:

In the first teaching practice, I worked only with the 6th grade and in the second with 1st, 2nd and 3rd grades. As far as possible, I sought to communicate with them through short sentences of English without giving up Portuguese. Even because I do not speak English fluently, as I would like, but slowly I will get there. I presented two songs: *Oh, if I catch you and my heart will go on*. First I took them to the computer lab where they could watch clips of the singers. Then we returned to the classroom, I distributed copies of the lyrics, turned on the player and we together sang along several times. Obviously, the songs were worked separately. The first was not necessary to mention the meaning because they already knew the same song in Portuguese. In the second, we talked about the meaning but we did not translate word for word. In addition, I worked with short dialogues and after several readings I asked that they continue practicing the dialogues. Some of the duos were chosen and dramatized the dialogue in class. It was a very worthwhile experience as several duos realized well this activity. A bit of grammar and more activities to practice were done (Felícia).

The version described by the teacher about her practice allows us to have several interpretations. One of them, perhaps that stands out more, is that the perpetuation of the traditional form of teaching continues, that the understanding that teacher Felícia tells us about her teaching practice is a version of the popular saying “only changing the cover”

that is only changing a mechanical activity for another more fun but not less traditional.

On the other hand, it is relevant to consider that, even though the traditional view of language remains, teacher Felícia added many more elements to her teaching practice, if we consider what she observed in the in-service teacher's classes and what she applied in her practice is the fruit of her observation about a "situated practice"; she unfolds her conception of learning English with more casualness in that she involves more than the linguistic element written on the blackboard – there are visual elements (clips of singers), linguistic elements in context (lyrics).

The teacher proposes a more interactive participation of the students – they "sing together", "converse about the meanings, but not translating word for word", change the environment and move their bodies in the school space during an activity in progression (watch, read, sing, converse about "the meaning" of the song) – despite the language being viewed in this context exclusively as an object of entertainment, there are points to be considered in the performance of the teacher.

It is possible to glimpse in her practice a possibility of transposition for the proposals of multimodality and multiliteracy, once that the elements of multimodality are present, however, her conception of language needs to be confronted and discussed with more critical perspectives for that transposition to occur.

According to Cope and Kalantzis (1996, p. 5), "the modes of representation are much more comprehensive than the language itself", they differentiate themselves according to each culture and their specific contexts producing different cognitive, cultural and social effects highlighting still that the "modes of meaning" are "dynamic representational resources", in "constant construction of meaning" in order to achieve diverse cultural, and we add ideological purposes, of each social group or community.

Reinterpreting the version of practice put forward by teacher Felícia, expanded with the perspective of Cope and Kalantzis (1996) about the concept of multimodality, we can not avoid to question about what meanings are being constructed by the pedagogical paths of teacher Felícia: are the social and cultural purposes being achieved? How the practice proposed by the teacher could contribute to promote social equality expanding the opportunities of access and the construction of possible futures for her students?

Questions of this type do permit us to understand the motive by which the concepts of critical literacy and the pedagogy of multiliteracies through their educational agents appear to be capable to draw possible pathways when you are thinking about revisiting and reframing the shape of linguistic education in Brazil.

However, for this to occur it is necessary a process of deconstruction and a reframing of the concept of language and a critical reflection about the impacts of their uses in the daily social practices. As pointed out by Cope and Kalantzis (1996, p. 64), “mere literacy” remains centered on the language as a set of linguistic structures, seen as system based on stable rules and with a unique possibility – “the grammatically correct version”, “the standard version of pronunciation”. And yet, according to studies, this view of language implies pedagogical interpretations more or less authoritarian.

If we return to our view of the situation of the classroom interpreted by teacher Felícia in her practice of observation, it is possible to visualize a pedagogical action more or less authoritarian and a “manifestation” by part of the students in relation to this form of conducting the proposed learning.

Reinterpreting that scene narrated in the quote of teacher Felícia, we ask: could the behavior of the students (complaining) be so unexpected? Is it not one of the “complaints” that we make as Brazilians? That only “we complain and do nothing to change”?

If it is change that we are seeking, it is important to consider “deconstruction” as an alternative method to be applied in our pedagogical practices taking the students to perceive how they form their thoughts, in which direction they construct their knowledge and from there feel capable of questioning the practices of teaching-learning and of contributing to new proposals.

To finish our dialogue with the data generated in the context of the second-degree program, we emphasize an aspect of a research made by the instructors Divina and Úrsula¹³ at the end of the second-degree program. They interviewed four teachers in public elementary education, two teachers of Portuguese and two teachers of English, to know which social themes interested more the students according to the perception of the teachers interviewed:

13 This is an excerpt taken from the first draft of a paper about the conclusion of the course of the Second Degree Program written by two professors of the 2nd term - 2012/2013, Divina e Úrsula – the data are referring to the themes discussed in secondary teaching.

There was no interest with respect to themes such as politics, globalization, sports, religion, access and quality of public health and education; already the students felt more interested with respect to social inequality, poverty, unemployment, misery, the arts, theater, cinema, music, racism against blacks, natives, orientals, gypsies, jews, discrimination and the violence against children and teenagers and against people with disabilities according to the responses of the interviewed teachers. It is questions about drugs, sexuality, discrimination against homosexuals and other genders in which they feel a little less interested (Divina e Úrsula).

The initiative of the teachers to investigate about possible social themes to be discussed in the classroom is an indication that they are willing¹⁴ to know the reality of the classroom and the reality (interest) of the students before planning or promoting their pedagogical actions.

However, what makes us think about these data is that while the students demonstrate interest about relevant social questions such as “social inequality”, “unemployment”, “poverty”, “discriminations and violence” against certain social groups, they showed that they are uninterested with respect to party politics and social politics, as if there is not a dialectic, dissonant, conflicting relation between both, remembering the interpretation of Minerva when she talked of the necessity to recognize the relations of power that occur through language and of the languages so that the project of citizenship education be effective in society.

According to Cervetti, Pardales and Damico (2001), this dissociation is a social effect that has profound roots in humanist-liberal thinking that sustains and perpetuates the traditional view of society. Critical literacy, in turn, carries strong traits of the critical theories of the Frankfurt School¹⁵ and the Freirean thinking that understands that the meanings are always negotiated and are always related to the incessant social battle in the dispute of ownership of knowledge, of power, of social status and of material resources.

14 When questioned about the motive by which they chose this object for their study of the conclusion of the course (an article of 05 pages about any theme addressed in the formation of the Second Degree Program), they said that they wanted to know so that they could “have an idea” of what to propose/do in their classes – Divina teaches Portuguese and Úrsula teaches English in the public school system in Rondonópolis-MT and a neighboring city.

15 For added knowledge of the critical theories that permeate the presuppositions of the theories of critical literacy, we suggest reading Cervetti, Pardales and Damico (2001), Menezes de Souza (2001) and Monte Mór (2010).

In this sense, to discuss social questions without providing theoretical opportunities for a criticism of society and its systems of perpetuations of inequalities does not appear to be a path compatible with the proposal of forming agents with resources of confrontation and “to know what to do in the absence of pre-established models conforming to the demands of new relations of the digital society”, as put by Lankshear and Knobel (2003, p. 168), much less promote the citizen formation of a subject capable of subversion or transformation of social practices.

Teachers in action¹⁶ (Sorriso)

The course “Continuing education of English teachers: critical teaching” was developed as an “outreach course” of the Federal University of Mato Grosso (UFMT), in partnership with the University of São Paulo (USP) in the national project “Education of teachers in the theories of new literacies and multiliteracies: critical teaching of foreign languages in school”, coordinated by professor Dra. Walkyria Monte Mór and by professor Dr. Lynn Mario Trindade Menezes de Souza.

In Mato Grosso, the actions of the national project were coordinated by professor Ana Antônia de Assis-Peterson and aimed to straighten links between the university and basic education attending the local demands of the education of English teachers as well as to serve as a field of study for two of her students. The course was taught by Lediane Manfê de Souza who was a teacher in the state school system doing her master degree at the Masters Program of Language Studies at UFMT.

As happens in many other Brazilian cities of the interior, the English teachers of Sorriso had not had the opportunity to participate in a course of long duration exclusively geared toward English, the discipline they teach. The course plan focused on the creation of opportunities for that teachers reflect about their pedagogical practices through the reconstruction of class plans based on the foundations of educational linguistics and critical literacy contemplating local pedagogical solutions and tuned to the actual context of globalization and the new paradigms of science, knowledge and culture.

16 The data presented in this section were generated by teachers participating in the course of continuing formation/education in the city of Sorriso for the master’s research in progress of Lediane Manfê de Souza, one of the authors of this article. On the occasion of the creation of a Facebook group, the teachers chose this name –mm Teachers in action – to identify themselves as participants of the course of continuing formation and thus the name was adopted for any activity referring to the course.

We sought in ethnography the base to sustain that everyone produces valid meanings from the place they are, from how they see the world and interpret it, taking care that the knowledge of the teachers was not disqualified or discarded in favor of theories. In the same way, the theory could also not be ignored – and by “ignored” we understand two meanings: being unaware and despising.

Each perspective presented was the object of dialogue, questioning, in the way that the participants could walk their own paths of self-reflection and of re-signification of concepts that turned explicit.

Taking the classroom experience as a starting point, the course was seen as a space for dialogue in which the teachers had a chance to evaluate and rethink their practices without forgetting the theoretical questions brought to the encounters.

Our purpose was to debate contemporary challenges in foreign language teaching. Starting with the foundation of linguistic education and critical literacy, the teachers could discuss about the language that they teach critically way and aligned to the concepts like significant learning, linguistic-cultural diversity, education for ethnic-racial relations and heterogeneity, global/local relations and globalization.

Thinking about this, we were interested to know from the teachers what epistemologies guided their practices and were implicit in their methodologies of work. We wanted to understand better how they formulated their theoretical concepts starting from that they discussed along the course and whether they had appropriated the concepts discursively.

During the meetings, *learning logs* were utilized as a reflexive tool; it was a concise, objective and personal way to register experiences and learning. In the month of June, the teachers wrote their perceptions about the following questions: *What is Critical Literacy? Is it possible to develop Critical Literacy in English Classes? How?*

For this analysis, some *learning logs* were chosen to help weave an understanding of how the teachers have been developing and practicing the critical sense in English class:

Literacy is teaching with the signification and contextualization of content for the students. More than possible, it is very important to develop literacy and this is possible when we bring daily situations, situations lived by the students (Prof. Diego).

For teacher Diego, the work with literacy is a situated practice and significant in that the role of the teacher occupies its position of *meaning maker*, falling on him to organize the learning in a way that meanings can emerge and be discussed. In the perspective of teacher Diego, “Literacy is the teaching of signification and contextualization”, a view that is shared by teacher Alice:

Literacy is to make the content that was covered in each year in a way that the students can make sense of it; it is to bring to the classroom reflections that awaken creativity in the students in relation to the society we live in. It is not that our students do not “know” this but it is to facilitate a space in which they can talk about matters that are often silenced by us teachers. This way we ought to give voice to our students opening for reflection about problems and solutions to better our society. It is possible to develop literacy in our classrooms because if we stop and think, we realize there is literacy in everything (Prof. Alice).

Teacher Alice views critical literacy as a (new) horizon for English classes; she considers “critical literacy” as a potential strong force perhaps capable of bringing daily life into the classroom and vice-versa. In this sense, we can interpret that to discuss subjects or themes of daily life is a desired practice, however, not treated in a critical way in schools.

The concept presented by teacher Alice gives evidence to the remnants of authoritarian thinking and she appears to start to see the legacy of these discourses in the teachers’ practices when she said: “It is not that the students do not “know” (...) often are silenced by us teachers”. Here, in this statement, there is an opening to dialogue with the teacher. By recognizing the relation of power between teachers and students, she makes an important step on a path that could lead to deconstruction/reflection/re-signification/transformation of her pedagogical practices.

What we perceive in the statements of the teachers in this study is that philosophical-social-political education is necessary in continuing education. Without critical ideas and methodologies that lead to inquiries of power relations, teachers and students voices are – they do not develop the aspect of transformation.

Teacher Alice, by concluding that “if we stop and think we realize there is literacy in everything”, permits us to interpret that, in the context of her discourse, (critical) literacy signifies a resource that allows us “to stop to think”. This reflection is a starting point that can take us to interesting places once that we wish to form autonomous teachers in

the Freirean sense as well as critical beings of a society heavily impacted by technology, homogenizing media and globalized politics that reinforce neo-liberal thinking.

For Alice, literacy is a way to “teach the content in a relevant manner”, what seems to lead us to the idea of “knowledge transmission” and not to the “knowledge construction”. However, when teacher Alice reiterates that the teacher is the bearer of this power to ‘give voice’ and that she agrees to concede such power to students, she is seeking a way to make flexible her practice, to decentralize her power even if this does not occur with much frequency.

The following account of teacher Irene contributes to our inquiries:

Yes, it's possible. We can use interesting subject and work the “difference”. Critical literacy is work to form and motivate citizenship (Profa. Irene).

It appears to us that, in the conception of teacher Irene, we encounter the assumption that critical literacy as a methodology offers the teacher condition to work her practices with students starting from themes of social character of the students’ interest – we see here an opportunity of construction of critical thinking about problems of the local/global order. Her voice brings a notion of literacy as an instrument of critical awareness and political reach in which it is possible to work “the difference”, forming and motivating students by way of critical awareness of one’s social reality through reflection and action that appears to be the path for citizenship practice and action.

The twists and turns that signify literacy in a critical perspective, revealed in the interpretation of teacher Alice, continue to flow in the perspective of teacher Irene, and find support in the following arguments of teacher Juan who sees in critical literacy the possibility of

Preparing the student to interpret, understand, suggest, share. Not only to copy and repeat the words. [...] I believe that is not easy to develop CL in English class but it is extremely necessary. We should research differentiating activities to innovate the way we conduct out “collaborative” classes that is to escape the same old routine (Prof. Juan).

Teacher Juan demonstrates hope in a participative construction that in his view is a path to escape the game of positivist-structuralist

paradigm – “copy and repeat”. Cope and Kalantziz (1996, p. 4) treat this when they indicate the importance in the contemporary scenario to consider discourses in movement and the demands that they impose on our lives¹⁷.

Schlatter (2009, p.20) calls attention to the role of the teacher in this new context, that is to educate students to participate in society asserting that this “requires the teacher that he be the author, that is, to have awareness of the necessity to relate theory and practice, reflection and action, objectives of FL teaching and the context of teaching [...]”.

Pondering over the anxieties of teacher Juan and the guiding thoughts of Schlatter (2009), we are able to see the desire of approximation, expressed clearly, between universities and public schools, a deep necessity of dialogue, a thirst for interaction, a search of identification of ideas and of perspectives, the hands offering themselves to “knead the dough”.

A little yet encouraging indicator that can guide us to a potentializing work of critical literacy of English teachers in Mato Grosso were the data that emerged from this proposal of continuing education of public school English teachers in the city of Sorriso-MT. We sought to bring to the field of discussions a look at how teachers perceive and understand critical literacy. The multiple meanings gathered here compose the epistemologies and practices of these teachers that, reflecting over the act of teaching and the relevance of this knowledge in the current global scenario, participated in collaborative actions that can result in the creation of opportunities of contextualized learning for their students.

Some thoughts (in movement)

We sought to bring to this article some clips of perspectives of teachers who work with the teaching of English in our state in order to make sense of what epistemologies and methodologies are in motion in their pedagogical conceptions.

The meanings gathered here compose the forms of thinking and applying the available knowledge of the English language in the public schools of practically the whole state, once that they feed and reproduce themselves by means of hegemonic discourses and homogenized thinking

17 Our interpretation of the original piece of text of Cope and Kalantzis (1996, p. 4): “to engage on the issue of what to do in literacy pedagogy, taking into account the changing word and the new demands being placed upon people as makers of meaning in changing workplaces; as citizens in changing public spaces and as citizens in changing dimensions of our community lives (our lifeworlds)”.

like language is a set of rules and to know English or a language is an instrument by which students can attain better results in exams leading to admission to university through the national entrance exam.

In this conception of “learning a language”, knowledge limits itself to grammatical rules and recognition of basic structures of language in a decontextualized form and without connection to the discursive realities of the students’ daily life. This knowledge is constituted by way of grammatical studies in its most traditional perspective and practices of consulting the dictionary, word for word. These traditional practices are rejected by the students and generate complaints and discontent.

The idea of innovation, especially for the teachers that applied for the second-degree program of English language because they were teaching “as blind men”, draws itself from the use of some technological resources in order to bring dynamics to the classroom. By inserting the use of technological resources and promoting movement in the pedagogical plan of the day, the teachers perceive indices of greater interaction and involvement and, for them, their teaching objectives of the day are fulfilled because the satisfaction obtained during class – both by the teachers who feel they are “innovators” and for the students who feel their needs attended – if compared to the traditional method of “copy and translate”. The satisfaction appears to work here as an indicator of successful learning.

When in contact with the more critical theories of teaching, the teachers start to demonstrate certain surprise and certain willingness to escape from what we call, for illustrative ends, “the territory of lamentations”. They appear to gain energy to attempt to conceive their own conceptualization of what critical literacy would be and start to look at their practices with open eyes sketching a desire to re-signify their pedagogical doings with respect to the teaching of English.

However, we perceive that the teachers need more frequent interactions and mediations for them to feel capable of facing the desired confrontations. This emerges in the statements of the teachers that seek a dialogue with more critical perspectives of teaching English.

The teachers showed will and disposition to participate in actions that could result in the creation of opportunities of more contextualized learning, “with the focus on meaning, in the use of language in situations of communication that can engage students in an adventure and in the discovery of reading and writing in search of autonomy and authorship” as proposed by Schlatter (2009, p.20).

In our view, more than authorship need to be achieved here. Because of this, we think in a perspective more politicized, more encouraging in the sense that teachers, through deconstruction and criticism to what is presented to them in their situated practices, may encounter their locus of enunciation in these accelerated contemporary settings in motion.

When confronted with their own proper dissents, generated by conflicting discursive crossings, perhaps the teachers can find a relative equilibrium inside of the diverse contexts and the different realities of teaching in which they live, with possibilities of being an agent of linguistic education in their location in permanent dialogue with agents of other local realities, in order to realize negotiation of meanings that can attend their necessities. And so hopes teacher Minerva:

[...] the individual will be inserted as a citizen, recognizing languages as conflicting, antagonistic, ambiguous; this requires the ability to construct and reconstruct meanings and to recognize diversities, to reinterpret (Profa. Minerva).

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